

An Ecosystemic Approach to Facilitating Reconciliation: We Are All In This Together

Stan Amaladas

Abstract

Informed by the disciplines of Leadership Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies, the authors offer an ecosystemic understanding of the relationship between peace, protests, and sustainable reconciliation. While the recent Covid-19 pandemic has prompted multiple reassurances that ‘we are all in this together,’ this paper focuses on conditions that must be present and conditions that opposes the quest for reconciliation from that reassuring perspective. Polarization of dualistic thinking (who is right/wrong), attitudes of superiority, and being driven by ‘negative visions,’ the authors argue, deny efforts for sustainable reconciliation. Aimed at building trust, sustainable reconciliation depends on the willingness of all parties to construct four critical conditions: soulful engagement at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural levels, increasing choices, purposeful dwelling, and deuterio-learning.

It is proper to every gathering that gatherers assemble to coordinate their efforts to sheltering; only when they have gathered with that end in view do they begin to gather. (Heidegger, 1977, n.p.).

Informed by the disciplines of Leadership Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies, the authors offer an ecosystemic understanding of the relationship between peace, protests, and sustainable reconciliation. While the recent Covid-19 pandemic has prompted multiple reassurances that ‘we are all in this together,’ this paper focuses on conditions that must be present and conditions that opposes the quest for reconciliation from that reassuring perspective. Polarization of dualistic thinking (who is right/wrong), attitudes of superiority, and being driven by ‘negative visions,’ the authors argue, deny efforts for sustainable reconciliation. Aimed at building trust, sustainable reconciliation depends on the willingness of all parties to construct four critical conditions: soulful engagement at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural levels, increasing choices, purposeful dwelling, and deuterio-learning. Informed by the disciplines of Leadership Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies, the purpose of this article is to offer an ecosystemic understanding of the relationship between peace, protests, and sustainable reconciliation. It attempts to offer both a theoretical and practical application of facilitating reconciliation. As I began writing this article, we were hit by the spread of COVID-19 which continues to consume our consciousness in the media, in societies around the world, and in our homes. This wicked disease is indifferent to whom it attacks and kills, and it recognizes no boundaries or treaties. With the presence of COVID-19, we kept hearing the phrase: “we are all in this together.”

The particular context that triggered our desire to write this article is the recent protests by some Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs and their supporters in Canada. Just before the global spread of Covid-19 consumed our lives, we in Canada, were trying to make sense of the Wet’suwet’en protests and arrests by the Royal Canadian Mounted police in northern British Columbia (B.C.). These arrests triggered railway blockades and other protests across the country

that led to the shutdown of rail services in the busiest corridor of Eastern Canada and higher levels of uncertainty, stress, and layoffs in the community.

While in the thick of these protests, the Government of Canada, under the prime minister-ship of Justin Trudeau, called for patience, dialogue, and mutual respect. On the other side of the political aisle, the current interim representative of the opposition Conservative party, Andrew Scheer, criticized the government for not enforcing the law, accused the protestors for holding the economy hostage, called on those who demonstrated their solidarity with Wet'suwet'en Nations to "check their privilege," and publicly stated in the House of Commons that "dialogue will not put food on the table." In the privacy of my own home, I was challenged by my daughter. "Dad, you teach and write about leadership. What will you do? I guess we are not all in this together, are we?" These questions posed to 'Dad,' spurred me to address the following research questions:

- For the sake of reconciliation and healing, what *conditions* must be present for all to act from the perspective that 'we are all in this together?'
- What *conditions* prevent us from seeing and acting from this perspective?
- What learning *process* can we construct to make it possible for self and others to act from the perspective of 'we are all in this together?'

In this article I will address the first two questions. The second article that will follow in the next issue of *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, will address the third question. In that upcoming article, I will address the theory and praxis of reconciliation at three interconnected levels, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural levels. There I will offer a deuterio-learning model for the sake of introducing a process of thinking and acting in ways that 'we are (indeed) all in this together.'

I will proceed first by expanding the context with a particular focus on the Wet'suwet'en protests and protests in general. Second, in relation to being 'brought to peace,' I will reconsider Heidegger's notion of what it means to dwell in this place called Canada within the context of Canada's history with its Indigenous population. Third, I will reflect on the notion of reconciliation. Fourth, I will proceed to outlining what it means to address reconciliation from an ecosystems thinking perspective. Finally, I will attend to the consequences of choosing not to engage in the art and practice of reconciliation.

Context: Wet'suwet'en Protests

In February of 2020, Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs staged protests in opposition to Coastal GasLink's plans to build a pipeline through their land. While the non-elected hereditary chiefs are a form of Indigenous governance that precedes British colonization, they are not a part of the structure of elected Indigenous Band Councils which was introduced by the Canadian federal government through the Indian Act. Some claim that The Indian Act is a form of imposed leadership structure that resembled Canada's system of governance (Lamoureux, 2018). The authority of the hereditary chiefs precede the Indian Act, and they continue to oversee the management of traditional lands. While the Indigenous Band Councils function as administrators of all federal funding provided by the Indian Act to First Nations, the "hereditary chiefs' authority is with respect to all of their ancestral lands and those are the lands that they're seeking to protect" (Stanton, as cited in Cousins, 2020).

The \$6.6 billion, 670-kilometer pipeline would carry natural gas across Northern British Columbia, Canada. According to the Coastal GasLink's website, this approved route "was determined considering Indigenous, landowner and stakeholder input, the environment, archaeological and cultural values, land use compatibility, safety, constructability and economics." The company noted that it signed agreements with the elected council of all 20 First Nations along the route. And, as National Chief Perry Bellegarde of the Assembly of First Nations, noted, the band councils did "their due diligence and they want to be part of this economic initiative, create jobs for their people, be part of the economy, and they balanced the environment and the economy" (as cited in Cousins, 2020).

On the other side of the coin, we hear from hereditary chiefs that they object to the pipeline because it could contaminate the land that is part of who they are, and upon which they depend on to harvest food, medicines, and draw water. While business executives warned that the rail blockades in Ontario, Quebec, and B.C were stalling the nation's economy, the protestors say that the real issue are Indigenous rights, the use and/or misuse of their land, and their livelihoods. Ansloos, a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation, and a University of Toronto professor, complained that the protests and arrests

...show an absolute disregard for the rights of (Indigenous Peoples), a complete abandonment of the so-called spirit of reconciliation, and a real instrumentalizing of federal colonial structure in the Indian Act to provide the appearance of consultation that's sufficient to meet UN standards. (as cited in Cousins, 2020)

Human protests are not a rarity in human history. In 1517, for example, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, protested against the Catholic Church and some of its teachings and practices. His protest led to the age of the protestant reformation. Mohandas Gandhi's peaceful march to the sea in 1930, and other acts of civil disobedience and principled non-violence, led to India regaining its independence from 250 years of British colonial rulership. While his supporters viewed him as *Mahatma*, meaning 'the great soul,' the Prime Minister of England at that time, Sir Winston Churchill, labeled him as a "seditious Middle Temple lawyer," who had the gall "to parley in equal terms with the representatives of the King Emperor" (as cited in Mukerjee, 2010, p. 25). In saying 'NO' to giving up her seat on the bus in 1955, Rosa Parks triggered a Montgomery bus boycott as a protest against a racialized system that entrenched 'force' in the hands of white citizens that robbed Afro-American citizens of their human dignity and their right to vote. Her protest led to the birth of the Civil Rights Movement. Today, we see other forms of protests as they are reflected in "#me too movement," #black lives matter movement," Women's Rights Movement, calls for Gender Equality and an end to violence against women, and the Equal Rights Movement.

Moving Away from Leader-Centric Models

While some may be tempted to ask valid questions like (a) how does a leader deal with polarized factions?, or (b) what values are implicit in a leader's protests?, or (c) how do leaders go about the process of inciting protests?, we choose to do otherwise. Notice, for example, that each of these three questions focuses on the person of the leader. It has led many to focus on a leader-centric approach to the study of leadership (Hunter, Bedell-Avers, & Mumford, 2007) and it has also led to calls to go beyond this predominant focus (Beau, 2016; 2009 Grint, 2005; 2011; Rost, 1991; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Part of the problem with leader-centric models is that it is

easy to blame the ‘person in charge’ (Heifetz, 1994). If they are elected officials, it is convenient to blame them for the failures to address any problem to electors’ satisfaction. Afterall, one might argue, is that not why they elected them in the first place? Blaming absolves one of taking responsibility for their own actions in any of those ‘failures.’ In our own reference to persons like Martin Luther, Gandhi, and Rosa Parks, we too can be accused of focusing on the ‘person.’

While we cannot deny the human agency of individual actors, there is something more. Their individual actions, for example, triggered the birth of “mass movements.” We might ask: “did Rosa Parks intend to initiate a mass protest like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, or the Civil Rights Movement?” Short answer: we do not know. All we do know is that she was tired of being pushed around. She was tired of being treated like a second-class citizen. When asked by students who interviewed her: “How do you feel about being called the ‘Mother of the Civil Rights Movement?’” Parks responded, “I don’t know who started calling me that, but I accept the title quite well” (Parks, 1979, Para. 19). The Civil Rights Movement was a result of others who joined-in with Park’s (protestors’) desire to be treated with dignity and as equals (common purpose). Others joined-in in a manner that affirmed that her (protestors’) voice also mattered to them.

When we speak of a “movement,” we cannot but shift our focus to the actions of a mixed collective: there will be some who join the initiated action of a person and some who will resist those actions. To think of leadership within the context of a mixed collective (where needs and goals may be common to some and contradictory to others) is to understand leadership as that which emerges through the social construction of relationships among initiator of actions and others who join or resist the initiator in bearing the responsibility of realizing the purpose of an initiated action. All initiated actions, however, do not occur in abstraction. They occur within the confines of a particular historical, societal, organizational, or individual context.

Contained within the paragraph above are four different and yet interrelated understanding of what it means “to act.” Allow us to turn to Arendt (1958), a political theorist, who outlined how the Greek and Latin vocabulary offer a fourfold distinction of the verb “to act.”

Table 1: *Greek and Latin Understanding of the verb “to act”*

Greek	Latin
<i>Archein</i> : “to begin”; “to lead” “to rule”	<i>Agere</i> : “to set in motion”; “to lead”
<i>Prattein</i> : “to pass through”; “to achieve”; “to finish”;	<i>Gerere</i> : “to bear”;

Whereas the Latin *agere* refers to leading as setting something new in motion (initiative), *prattein* and *gerere* speak instead to the possibility of others (followers) joining in to “bear” and “finish” the work by seeing it through (achievement). Today, *prattein/gerere* (achievement, accomplishing goals, shared or otherwise, and finishing the task), have become the accepted understanding of action in conventional definitions of leadership. The leader is seen, especially in industrial paradigms of leadership, as achieving or producing excellence (Rost, 1991, p. 118). Rost argues that this concept effective leadership, namely, intending (promising) change and producing intended changes continues to be taught in management schools. Success, in this case is the actual production of intended or promised results. From the standpoint of *agere*, the strength of leadership, however, is displayed in their “initiative” and “the risk” they take, “not in the actual achievement” (Arendt, 1958, p. 190). The frustration that is experienced with action as initiative (*agere*) are twofold, (a) its outcomes are unpredictable, and (b) the intended and

unintended consequences of initiated actions are irreversible. This “exasperation” and “frustration” of action are “almost as old as recorded history” (Arendt, 1958, p. 220). In as much as initiatives for social justice began years ago, today, we continue to experience the unfinished outcomes of promised results. The Wet’suwet’en protests and #BlackLives Matter movement are but examples of our “unfinished business.”

A Bigger Story

Within the context of the Wet’suwet’en protests, Canadians find themselves in the middle of a bigger story. It is a story that is itself informed by two differing narratives of Canada’s collective memories. As Ladner, noted “for Indigenous peoples, the story of Canada is one of myth, magic, deceit, occupation, and genocide. For Canadians, the story is one of discovery, lawful acquisition, and the establishment of peace, order, and good governance” (2009, p. 279). If anything, these differing historical narratives of the colonized and colonizers (collective memories) encapsulates the gap between many Aboriginal and settler peoples. If the latter story is accepted without question, then how can we account for continuing Indigenous protests that continue to erupt in Canada? If the former story is not to be denied, then Canadians find themselves in the middle of a story of what the authors of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CTRC) report called “cultural genocide” (2015, p. 1). It included

- The destruction of structures and practices that prevent that Indigenous people to continue as a group.
- The seizing of lands, forcibly transferring Indigenous populations, and restricting movement.
- The banning of the Indigenous language, the persecution of spiritual leaders, and forbidding Indigenous spiritual practices
- The disruption of the transmission of Indigenous cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.

This is not a fictitious story. It is a historical fact. In this sense, the very idea of reconciliation calls Canadians to come to terms (re-concile) with its own history. To the CRTC, “‘reconciliation’ is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (Volume 6, p. 4). The authors of CTRC also affirm that the problem of reconciliation is “not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one” (p. v). In so affirming, they suggest that reconciliation is not in the hands of any one person in any elected position of authority, it is not in the hands of any one government of the day, and neither is it only in the hands of the Aboriginal population. It is in effect in the hands of ALL Canadians (reconciliation belongs to all), and to NO ONE Indigenous or non-Indigenous person in particular. What they seem to be saying is that the problem of reconciliation calls all Canadians to begin with the epistemology that “we are all in our brokenness together.”

What then does it mean for Canadians to gather around their brokenness as they share a common dwelling place and history? Listen, for example, to the philosopher Heidegger who graced the opening page of our article: “It is proper to every gathering that gatherers assemble to coordinate their efforts to sheltering; only when they have gathered with that end in view do they begin to gather” (1977, n.p.). If reconciliation is a Canadian problem, then, all who gather with a view to reconciling are being called to gather with a purposeful intention, namely, to engage in conversations in ways that focus on the question of how they choose to commonly dwell

(shelter) in this common dwelling place called Canada without killing each other, or without simply being in opposition with each other, or simply tolerating the existence of the other. Understood in this way, tolerance is about “us” and “them.” It is about “us” tolerating “them.” Understood in this way, it continues to perpetuate polarization rather than unity. It denies the reality that there is only “us” in our dwelling place. It is here that we turn our attention to what Heidegger (1977) can teach us about what it means to dwell.

Heidegger: On Building and Dwelling

Heidegger informs us that we cannot talk about dwelling without talking about what we have built – with a twist. For him, building is really dwelling. “We do not dwell,” as he noted, “because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are *dwellers*” [*Italics in original*] (1977, p. 326). Heidegger turns to what the *language* of ‘dwelling’ offers.

The old Saxon *wuon*, the Gothic *wunian*...means to remain, to stay in a place. But the Gothic *wunian* says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, *das Frye*; and *fry* means preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free actually means to spare...To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free...(Heidegger, 1997, p. 326)

To remain and to stay in Canada as a collective, is a question of how this remaining and staying can be experienced. Following Heidegger, it can be experienced as “being at peace” or as “being brought to peace.” To stay in this place, requires gatherers to purposefully coordinate their efforts to their sheltering in ways that preserves, spares, and safeguards each other from harm and danger. In gathering with this end in view, gatherers make an intentional, purposive, and enlightened choice (Amaladas, 2018). For Heidegger, one enlightened choice is that all in the gathering take responsibility for safeguarding each other by subordinating or surrendering themselves to being governed by the principles of sparing, preserving, and safeguarding each other from harm or danger. Why? Because this is what friends do. Friends care by considering how each act or proposal would affect, and indeed, cannot not affect every other group or person. This is, in effect, the proposition of ecosystems thinking. It is the violation of these principles that informs the literature on reconciliation.

On Reconciliation

According to a United Nations report in 2004, the human history of reconciliation emerges out of attempts to deal with the legacy of violence and large-scale past abuses. Some, in the field of Peace Studies, have associated reconciliation with efforts at social rehabilitation and suggests that both are considered as one of the major components of reconstructing postconflict societies (Jeong, 2019). Others like Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004) and Bar-Simon-Tav (2004), maintain that only reconciliation can build stable and lasting peace. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly evident that formal peace agreements fall short of establishing genuine peaceful relations between former adversaries (Lederach, 1997; Knox & Quirk, 2000). Other studies are also demonstrating that conflicts that are settled through negotiated settlements are not

sustainable. Zambakari (2018), for example, appealed to the results of negotiated settlements by The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. This Centre notes that 43 percent of contemporary conflicts relapse into renewed violence within five years. In their research, Jarstad and Sundberg (2007) mentioned that one third of 69 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2000 failed, resulting in resumption of civil wars.

Galtung (1998) underscores the importance of reconciliation through his affirmation of how individual and collective trauma left behind by large scale violence is passed from one generation to the next, perpetuating cycles of violence. Galtung argues that violent conflict over what he calls the “root” conflict, can generate a “meta conflict,” namely a “conflict that comes out of, or after, the root conflict, the over layer” (1998, p. 3). For Lumsden, this meta-conflict can become an “*unconscious organizing principle*,” (1999, p. 3), in that it can determine how people see the world a generation later and how they choose to act. This unconscious organizing principle can perpetrate killing the other or legitimizing other violent forms of dealing with conflict.

Kriesberg defines reconciliation as a “process of developing a mutual conciliatory accommodation between antagonistic and formerly antagonistic persons or group” (1998, p. 184). He identifies four dimensions of reconciliation as societies emerge from conflict: shared truth, justice, regard, and security. Lederach (1997) offers a systems thinking approach to reconciliation by attending to the dynamics of relationships in what he calls the conflict system. For him, the practice of reconciliation “must be proactive in seeking to create an encounter where people can focus on their relationships and share their perceptions, feelings, experiences with one another, with the goal of generating new perceptions and a new shared experience” (Lederach, 1997, p. 30). Both Kriesberg and Lederach share aspects of Kelman’s view that conflict is an “interactive” and intersocietal” process driven by both “collective needs and fears” and by rational calculation of power and interests (1997). For Fisher, on the other hand, the dynamics of conflict escalation results from subjective experiences like “misperceptions, mistrust, and frustrated basic needs” (1999, p. 85). Similarly, Lederach (1997; 2005) also understands conflict as being an *intra* rather than *inter*-state and occur between factionalized identity groups who live in close proximity to each other.

Scholars from both Peace Studies (Burton, 2001) and Leadership Studies (Burns, 1978; 2003) affirm that the full meaning of social justice and reconciliation depends on a non-negotiable social principle of treating “persons like *persons*” (Burns, 1978, p. 462, *Italics in original*) and not as pawns to be manipulated, enslaved, or controlled. It is to regard human dignity and human rights as a sacred gift that humans give to each other. At a political level, however, what stands in the way is what Giddens (1984) identifies as the presence of ‘power asymmetry.’ Power asymmetry is a state in which differences in status exist between individuals and groups of individuals within a social or organizational hierarchy resulting in differential ability to take action or cause action to be taken. It is also a state that surfaces the unbalance of resources and authority among the actors which operate in the same network. Within this condition of ‘power asymmetry,’ Burton, argues that power-asymmetry, “subjects” individuals “to the effects of ‘structural violence,’ that is that they are hurt by the institutions and norms of society including such inequalities and discrimination” (2001, n.p.). Frustration behaviours like protests, drug use, suicide, gang violence are outcomes of power-asymmetries.

What then is this literature on reconciliation telling us? First, while reconciliation, as a possibility, emerges out of conflict, it promises the possibility of sustainability in ways that negotiated peace settlements cannot. Second, that reconciliation needs to occur at three levels:

intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural. Jeong (2009) and Kiss (2000), for example, remind their readers that reconciliation cannot be reconstructed through judicial instruments alone. As Jeong notes, “political, cultural, psychological, and spiritual means are demanded as well” (2009, p. 156). Third, that reconciliation is a process towards a shared appreciation and understanding that we can live in our common dwelling place in ways that spares and preserves each other from harm and danger. Finally, that we will have more of the same (violence) should we choose to preserve power asymmetrical relationships and choose to not to go down this less traveled road called reconciliation.

On Negative/Positive Visions

It is quite telling that today, while we are in the middle of a global pandemic called Covid-19, we also hear this same mantra from nearly every senior official and from leading media outlets across Canada and the world: “*we are all in this together.*” On the one hand this mantra is a social affirmation that we, as individuals and as a collective, are interconnected. Not only are we interconnected with each other, but we are also interconnected with our land, our natural environment, and our food (what we choose to eat or not eat). In the midst of Covid-19, we become very aware that we are interconnected in the sense that what I do or not do in your presence (for example, wearing a mask) will affect you and vice versa. On the other hand, it is also a cautionary note that if we do not do what is necessary to act together to contain, not spread the virus, and find a cure for this disease, then we will all lose. Within the context of Covid-19, that “we are all in this together” is a non-negotiable concept. However, unlike calls to “wash your hands,” during this Covid-19 times, punctuating ourselves as separate from what is affecting us does not free us to wash our hands of our collective responsibility and concern about outcomes.

In the middle of Covid-19, it appears as if the call to act from the perspective that “we are all in this together,” to pull together in ways that are united and not divided, is heard more clearly because our survival is threatened. ‘We are all in this together,’ then appears to gain momentum from the perspective of what we don’t want to experience: death, losing jobs, restricted movement, quarantine, social distancing, self isolation, and so forth. For Senge (2006), an organizational learning theorist, these are examples of a ‘negative vision’ (what we don’t want) and he observes that this is, “more common in public leadership, where societies are continually bombarded with visions of ‘anti-drug,’ ‘antismoking,’ ‘antiwar’ or ‘anti-nuclear strategy’” (p. 209). If this is so, then when a cure is found for Covid-19, when the threat of survival is no more, the call to act as if we are all in this together and the energy that is spent on acting in solidarity, will also naturally disappear.

Within the context of our complex Canadian history, reconciliation does not appear to have that same negative vision or force as Covid-19. It is not motivated by the question of “what do we want to avoid?” but rather by the question of “what do we want?” Reconciliation is not motivated by the fear of avoiding what we do not want (we don’t want to be killed by a virus, we don’t want protests). It is instead governed by the aspiration of what we do want (to live together in ways that spare and preserve each other from harm and danger). To reject this would in effect mean rejecting the notion that we are all in this together.

The very presence of protests can be viewed as practices that are themselves governed by aspirations for social justice, for being treated with dignity and respect, for freedom, for power symmetry, and for treating persons as persons and not as pawns to be controlled and

manipulated. These are not dependent upon the presence or absence of any particular virus. Reconciliation, as a Canadian aspiration, will remain with us even after the cure for Covid-19 is found. Paradoxically, the aspiration for what we do want necessitates that as a collective, we intentionally turn toward rather than away from practices that we want to see avoided in our public sphere.

Ecosystemic-Thinking

We cannot deny that *one* conceptual framework that speaks to the interconnectedness of our relationships with each other, is embedded in the frame of ecosystemic thinking. Ecosystemic thinking challenges us to pay attention to three critical principles: (a) unveiling how we know what we know, (b) focusing on relationships of interdependence and its breakdowns, and (c) context. In relation to knowing what it means to lead for peace, we learn that whereas the concept of peace has been understood as freedom from war, violence, or dissension (negative peace), it has also been understood as a journey towards a state of harmony between people or groups, or the aspiration for social justice (positive peace) (Galtung, 1964). At a conceptual level ecosystemic thinking suggests that we can only come to know humanly constructed concepts like peace only in relation to the concept of war, violence, dissension, conflict. Following cultural anthropologists Mead (1968) and Bateson and Bateson, (1987), in their thinking of second-order cybernetics or the cybernetics of cybernetics, Flemons (1991) and Becvar and Becvar (2018) argue that, we come to know what we know with the drawing of a distinction, or with the noting of a difference. The distinctions we make, reflect the values in our purpose for making any distinction.

From the perspective of relationships of interdependence, while these humanly constructed concepts and distinctions (peace/war; positive/negative), describe two different kinds of social relationships, they are complementary, and this “complementarity between peace and war...describes one concept rather than two” (Becvar & Becvar, 2018, p. 15). They are concepts and ways of living that imply an interdependent relationship. In as much as Kriesberg defines reconciliation as a “process of developing a mutual conciliatory accommodation between antagonistic and formerly antagonistic persons or group” (1998, p. 184), and Jeong (2009) as a process of mutual accommodation comprised of acknowledgment of past wrongdoing and contrition,¹⁴ from the perpetrators in exchange for forgiveness offered by the victims” (2009, p. 156), this need to reconcile, implies a breakdown or a brokenness of interdependencies that emerges out of a particular context, namely an experience of the imposition of one independence upon the other (Galtung, 2001).

Ecosystemic Thinking and the Possibility of Increasing Choices

Allow us to frame our story of interconnectedness by telling a story. It is a story narrated by a systems thinker, von Foerster (1990), in his *Opening Address for the International Conference, Systems and Family Therapy: Ethics, Epistemology, New Methods*.

I have a dear friend who grew up in Marrakech. The house of his family stood on the street that divide the Jewish and the Arabic quarter. As a boy he played with all the others, listened to what they thought and said, and learned of their fundamentally different views. When I asked him once, "Who was right?" he said, "They are both right."

"But this cannot be," I argued from an Aristotelian platform, "Only one of them can have the truth!"

"The problem is not truth," he answered, "The problem is trust."

This boy who lived on a street that divides, who remained connected to both Jews and Arabs by playing with them, listening to what each thought and had to say, and learning their fundamentally different views, affirmed that the real problem is not one of who is right and who is wrong, but rather that it resided in the capacity to think and act in ways that offers a third, or fourth or fifth choices. The quest for knowing "who is right?" and "who is wrong?" closes-off choices. It orients more to the disconnectedness among people rather than how they are connected. It socially divides those who live on a street that physically divides. The singular quest for *the* truth, as the boy who straddled between and remained connected to both the Arabic and Jewish quarters affirms, closes-off the quest for understanding that what is really at stake is trust. To accept this is to accept that both sides have *a* truth that not only needs *to be* heard and respected, but also that both sides need *to feel* heard and respected. Without the experience of feeling heard, trust will not be a possibility.

To act as if 'we are all in this together' then, is to act in ways that not only generates conditions of trust but also to act in ways that are worthy of trust. Earlier, we noted that reconciliation emerges out of the ashes of brokenness. Now we are able to affirm that what is broken is trust. Within the context of the Wet'suwet'en protests then, it cannot simply be a matter of asking if "the protestors were right," or if "the protestors were wrong" in protesting. At the same time, it cannot also simply be a matter of asking if "the government of Canada was right in their response to protestors," or if "the Government of Canada was wrong in their response to protestors." The real issue is not who is right or wrong but the brokenness of trust. The re-building of trust, however, insofar as it aids us in the process of reconciliation, rests in the hands of all Canadians – it is not only everybody's business, but it also requires a structural re-building of power symmetry.

Either/Or Thinking

To frame the problem of interconnectedness as the problem of increasing choices, is to challenge a predominant and deeply ingrained either-or mental model. For Senge (2006), mental models "are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (p. 8). Determining who is right or who is wrong, would be a naturally forced consequence of this either-or way of thinking. It is to think and act as if there are no, and can be no, other choices other than "only one of them can have the truth."

Either-or way of thinking and living would only lead us down the path of "us" (non-protestors/protestors) and "them" (protestors/non-protestors). Within this either-or framework, the very idea of "we are all in this together" cannot be a possibility. Either-or thinking forces us to take sides (as if there are no other options). For Lederach, a practitioner who "spent most of (his) professional life working with deep-rooted conflicts and violence" (2005, p. 66), in this either-or model, "side-taking, unfortunately seems to accompany social battle-fields and therefore accepts the premise that change is inherently a dualistic struggle" (2005, p. 87).

Within the context of ‘protests,’ in the same way that peace and protest (conflict) are concepts that belong together in the sense that we cannot talk of one without the other, this dualistic way of thinking treats the “us” and the “them” in isolation from (disconnected), rather than as connected to, each other. Paradoxically, in order to stop the spread of Covid-19, the very idea and practice of social distancing and self-isolation that is being encouraged (because we are all in this together), leads to a polarization within the context of protests (which affirms that we are not all in this together). Whereas there is a distinct clarity in what social distancing and self-isolation seeks to achieve while in the middle of a serious virus infection, there is also a distinct clarity in what the practice of isolating ‘who is right’ and ‘who is wrong’ achieves. This “individual in self-isolation model,” as Minuchin noted, can be viewed as “imposing an either/or dichotomy that doesn’t encompass the complexity of human processes. In the attempt to achieve clarity, it polarizes” (1984, p. 148). So, could it be that as human behaviour can at times be self-defeating and in need of psychotherapy, this very epistemology of either/or, and the question of who is right and who is wrong are themselves dysfunctional and in need of therapy?

To frame the problem of interconnectedness as a problem of trust, is to open ourselves up to situating ourselves within the ecology of preserving and safeguarding each other from harm and care - caring for each other as human beings, caring for our environment, caring for nature, caring enough to change power asymmetries, and caring for our history in ways that seeks to heal the wounds of past relationships. What if we choose not open ourselves up to the ecology of caring? What if we choose to not give ourselves the gift of healing? To not go down the road to reconciliation is to not, as Burns notes, “to feel the need for change” because “where nothing is felt nothing matters” (1978, p. 44). Allow us to share a poem written by James Patrick Kinney, within the context of the American Civil Rights Movement where people of colour were fighting for their basic rights as American citizens and for the right to be treated with human dignity, while being treated with indignity and as non-persons in that process.

The Cold Within

Six men, trapped in happen-stance,
 In bleak and bitter cold.
 Each man possessed a stick of wood,
 Or so the story is told.
 Their dying fire in need of logs.
 The first man held his back, for of the faces around the fire, he noticed one was black.
 The second man looking across the way saw one not of his church
 And could not bring himself to give the fire his stick of birch.
 The third man, sat in tattered clothes,
 He gave his collar a hitch: “Why should his log be put to use to warm the idle rich?”
 The rich man sat and thought of all the wealth he had in store,
 And how to keep what he had earned from the lazy shiftless poor.
 The black man’s face bespoke revenge,
 As the fire passed from sight.
 All he saw in his stick of wood was a chance to spite the white.
 The last man of this forlorn group did nought except for gain,
 Giving only to those who gave is how he played the game.
 Their logs held tight in human hands was proof of human sin,

They did not die from the cold without,
They died from the cold within.
 (as cited in Hawkins, 2012)

The call to reconciliation is a call for all Canadians to actively participate in keeping their communal fire alive. Reconciliation calls all Canadians to “let go” of all that traps them to hold on tightly to their unconscious organizing principles of prejudice, negative labelling, orienting to others only in transactional ways, and desire for revenge. At the same time, insofar as “letting go,” from an ecosystemic thinking perspective, stands in a relationship with “letting come,” then what does the latter introduce to the reality of these six men in Kinney’s story? “Letting come,” introduces the possibility of possibilities. It awakens them to the possibility that other choices are available - choices that would keep their dwelling warm and alive from their decision to reignite the fire from within in spite of their cold reality. It offers the possibility, to quote the *Man from La Mancha*, for all Canadians to dream the impossible dream, to right the unrightable wrong, to fight the unbeatable foe, to go to places where the brave dare not to go, and to quest reaching for the unreachable star - believing in the possibility that it can be reached.

Conclusion

In this article, we raised two questions. First, “for the sake of reconciliation and healing, what *conditions* must be present for all to act from the perspective that ‘we are all in this together?’ Second, what *conditions* prevent us from seeing and acting from this perspective? In response to both, we suggested that all in this dwelling place called Canada:

- Situate themselves in the ecology of caring and trusting
- Subordinate or surrender themselves to being governed by the principles of sparing, preserving, and safeguarding each other from harm or danger.
- Attend to non-negotiable principles of social justice and treating persons as persons.
- Shift away from their either-or dualistic thinking that has come to dominate our modern era.
- Intentionally orient to the possibility of third, fourth, or fifth choices and to the possibility of possibilities.
- Aspire for what they want as a collective by intentionally turning toward rather than away from practices that they want to see avoided in their public sphere.
- Be willing to “let go” of hurt, pain, guilt, and a spirit of revenge and “let come” the courage to dream the impossible dream as a real possibility.

References

- Amaladas, Stan, 2018. *Intentional leadership: Getting to the heart of the matter*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group
- Arendt, Hannah, 1958. *The human condition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bar-Tal, Daniel and Bennink, Gemma. 2011. Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process. In Yaacov. Bar-Siman-Tov, ed., *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*. Oxford Scholarship Online. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166439.001.0001.

- Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. 2011. Introduction: Why Reconciliation? In Y. Bar-Siman-Tov (Ed.) *From conflict resolution to reconciliation*. Oxford Scholarship Online. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166439.001.0001.
- Bateson, Gregory and Bateson, Mary Catherine. 1987. *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred*. New York: Macmillan.
- Beau, Gaelle. 2016. Beyond the Leader-Centric Approach. *Society and Business Review*, 11:1, 62-79.
- Becvar, Ray, and Becvar, Dorothy. 2018. Facilitating Peace: Perspectives from ecosystemic family therapy. In Stan Amaladas & Sean Byrne, eds., *Peace Leadership: A Quest for Connectedness*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Burns, James MacGregor. 1978. *Leadership*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Burns, James MacGregor. 2003. *Transforming leadership: A new pursuit of happiness*. New York: Grove Press.
- Burton, John, W. 2001. Introducing the person into thinking about social practices. *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, 6(1) n.p.
- Burton, John, W. 2001. Conflict Prevention a Political System. *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, 6(1) n.p.
- Coastal GasLink <https://www.coastalgaslink.com/construction/> Accessed March 12, 2020.
- Cousins, Ben. (2020). Wet'suwet'en: What's the difference between the elected band council and hereditary chiefs? <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/wet-suwet-en-what-s-the-difference-between-the-elected-band-council-and-hereditary-chiefs-1.4811453> Accessed March 12, 2020.
- Fisher, Ronald. 1997. *Interactive Conflict Resolution*. In William Zartman and Lewis Rasmussen, eds., *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Flemons, Douglas. 1991. *Completing Distinctions*. Boston, MA: Shambala Publications, Inc.
- Galtung, Johan. 1964) An editorial. *Journal of Peace Research*, 1(1), 1-14.
- Galtung, Johan. 1990. Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27 (3), 291-305.
- Galtung, Johan. 2001. After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution: Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence,” In M. Abu-Nimer (Ed.) *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory & Practice*, (pp. 3–23). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Galtung, Johan. 2014. A Mini-Theory of Peace. Retrieved from <https://www.galtung-institut.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Mini-Theory-of-Peace.pdf> Accessed April 5, 2020.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *A constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press
- Grint, Keith. 2005. *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grint, Keith. 2011, A History of Leadership, In Alan Bryman, David Collinson, Keith Grint and Mary Uhl-Bien eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership*, New York: SAGE Editions.
- Hawkins, Sandra. 2012. “The Cold Within” by James Patrick Kinney: Poem. Purpose. Progress. Retrieved from, <http://www.allthingsif.org/archives/1405>
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977. *Basic Writings*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Heifetz, Ronald. 1994. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

- Hunter, Samuel, Bedell-Avers, Katrina and Michael Mumford, M. 2007. The Typical Leadership study: Assumptions, Implications, and Potential Remedies. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, 435-446.
- Jarstad, Anna, and Sundberg, Ralph. 2007. "Peace by Pact: Data on the Implementation of Peace Agreements." In Ashok Swain, Ramses Amer and & Joakim Öjendal, eds., *Globalization and Challenges to Building Peace*. London, UK: Anthem.
- Jeong, Ho-Won. 2010. *Conflict management and resolution: An introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Jeong, Ho-Won. 2019. *Conflict intervention and transformation: Theory and Practice*. London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.
- Kelman, Herbert. 1997. "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict." In William Zartman and Lewis Rasmussen, eds., *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Knox, Colin and Quirk, Pádraic. 2000. *Peace building in Northern Ireland, Israel, and South Africa: Transition, transformation, and reconciliation. From conflict resolution to reconciliation*. London: Macmillan.
- Kriesberg, Louis. 1998. Coexistence and the Reconciliation of Communal Conflicts. In Eugene Weiner, ed., *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*. New York : The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Ladner, Kiera. 2009. Take 35: Reconciling constitutional orders. In Annis May Timpson, ed., *First Nations, First thoughts: The Impact of Indigenous Thought in Canada*. Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press.
- Lamoureux, Kevin. 2018. Reconciliation and the Language of Reconciliation. In In Stan Amaladas & Sean. Byrne, eds., *Peace Leadership: A Quest for Connectedness*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Lederach, John Paul. 1997. *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Lederach, John Paul. 2005. *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lumsden, Malvern. 1999. Breaking the Cycle of Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 34: 4. 377-383.
- Mead, Margaret. 1968. Cybernetics of Cybernetics. In Heinz von Foerster, John White, Larry Peterson and John Russell, eds., *Purposive Systems*. New York: Spartan Books.
- Minuchin, Salvador. 1984. *Family Kaleidoscope*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mukerjee, Mudhurshee. 2010. *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II*. New York: Basic Books.
- Parks, Rosa. 1979. Rosa Parks: How I fought for Civil Rights. In Culture & Change: black History in America. Retrieved from <http://teacher.scholastic.com/rosa/interview.htm> Accessed March 3, 2020
- Rost, Joseph. 1991. *Leadership for the Twenty First Century*. New York: Praeger.
- Senge, Peter. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Thoroughgood. Christian, Sawyer, Katina, Padilla, Art, and Lunsford, Laura. 2018. Destructive Leadership: A Critique of Leader-Centric Perspectives and Toward a More Holistic Definition. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 151, 627-649.

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2015. *Honoring the Truth, Reconciling the Future*. Retrieved from, <http://nctr.ca/reports.php> Accessed March 15, 2020
- Von Foerster, Heinz. 1990 Ethics and Second-Order Cybernetics. Opening address for the *International Conference, Systems and Family Therapy: Ethics, Epistemology, New Methods*, Paris, France, October 4th, 1990.
- Zambakari, Christopher. 2018. Conceptualizing Reconciliation in Transitional Processes. *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 30:3, 373-381, DOI: 10.1080/10402659.2018.1496996